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SUBJECT: OSCE CIO STANDS FIRM ON HUMAN RIGHTS AGENDA

Summary

1. (SBU) Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Chairman-in-Office, Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel De Gucht, visited Turkmenistan on March 29. Ashgabat OSCE Center Human Dimensions Officer Benjamin Moreau told Pol/Econ Off on March 31 that De Gucht emphasized to both President Niyazov and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Rashit Meredov that all future cooperation is linked to human rights improvement and democratic reforms. End Summary.

Meredov Request: No Mention of HR Cases to President

2. (SBU) According to Moreau, De Gucht delivered "verbatim" OSCE Ashgabat's talking points to Foreign Minister Meredov during a lunch March 29, emphasizing human rights. Meredov then asked De Gucht not to discuss individual human rights cases with Niyazov.

3. (SBU) Undeterred by Meredov's request, De Gucht raised four specific human rights cases with Niyazov during their almost two-hour conversation:

Muhammetguly Aymyradov, political prisoner since 1995, (included in the 2005 Human Rights Report (HRR)).

Rahym Esenov, writer denied permission to go to Moscow for medical treatment, (included in the 2005 HRR).

Guljan Koker, Turkish Turkmen dual national denied permission to return to Turkey because she is the niece of former Foreign Minister and Ambassador to the OSCE Batyr Berdiev who was accused of participating in the 2002 assassination attempt of President Niyazov. This is an OSCE advocacy case.

Members of the family of former Deputy Central Bank Chairman Annadurdy Hajiev, who is a member of the Turkmen opposition group "Watan Socio-Political Movement" established by former Central Bank Chief Hudayberdy Orazov. Since 2002, Hajyev and his wife, Chairwoman of the Turkmenistan Helsinki Fund Tajigul Begmedova, live in exile in Varna, Bulgaria. They both were declared wanted by GOTX authorities for their alleged involvement in the USD 41 million theft

from Turkmenistan's Central Bank in the summer of 2002. Primary suspect in that crime, Arslan Kakayev, is a nephew of Tajigul Begmedova. Following the theft, several of Begmedova's (at least a brother and a sister) and Hajyev's (at least a brother) relatives were arrested and convicted in Turkmenistan. Begmedova's father Sazak Begmedov, former Deputy Prosecutor General of Turkmenistan, was forcibly resettled from Ashgabat to Dashoguz where he currently lives. Elements of this case are included in the 2005 HRR. This is an OSCE advocacy case.

The president gave his word that he would personally address these issues and De Gucht promised to pass all of the case information formally to the president via the MFA.

14. (U) Additionally, the OSCE's March 29 press release noted that De Gucht spoke with Niyazov about the need to amend national legislation to bring it into compliance with international conventions and the need for international organizations to have unlimited access to prisoners. De Gucht said that the OSCE is willing to support the education sector and he emphasized participation in exchange programs. He also urged the GOTX to organize free and open elections in July. De Gucht also spoke about energy issues and Europe's future needs for Turkmenistan's gas.

Comment

15. (SBU) That De Gucht took the opportunity to raise high-profile human rights cases with the president, the

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only person in the government with the power to resolve them, was welcome. Previous OSCE CiOs have focused primarily on bilateral issues. Post is working on late April travel arrangements for Esenov, so De Gucht's efforts might prove timely for a successful resolution of, at least, one additional human rights/freedom of movement case. End Comment.

JACOBSON